

Border continued

adding. Three more bureaucracies. Plenty is the confusion over which outside government has jurisdiction. It is the granddaddy of all tug-of-wars in the great tradition of King Solomon, with all outsiders happy to share the responsibility of a child split down the middle.

While we're counting governmental jurisdictions, there is the Reservation proper with separate protocols for both sides of the border. Three of them. Brace yourself.

In the U.S., the St. Regis Tribal Council runs the political show. On the Canadian side, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne. As if that were not a large enough schism within the 9,000 resident community, traditional Mohawks refuse to participate in either form, preferring instead to support what is called the Mohawk Nation Council, the Tribe's original form of self-determination. Traditionalism is foundational on ancient matriarchal principles, believed by many scholars to be the oldest living participatory democracy on earth. Indeed, most Traditionals have never voted in an election, either on or off the Territory, because of a culturally-inspired aversion to European (American-Canadian) style democracies.

To make matters worse, none of the outside governments, in their paternalistic fervor, can agree on much of anything. No wonder most Mohawks have a long-abiding distrust of outside influence. Those deep suspicions are well founded and stem from decades of broken promises, treaty and otherwise. And from both the north and south.

In the early 1990s, Ottawa upped the tax on cigarettes to a point its smoking public was paying in excess of \$41 (Canadian) for a single carton. The idea was to make the price of butts so high that it would encourage young people to forgo the inhaling ritual. It was a strategy that didn't work.

Enter the smugglers, both white and Mohawk, and the giant cigarette companies including Montreal based RJR-Macdonald and Imperial, all of whom recognized a genuine pot-of-gold when they saw one. Before long, huge increases in tax-free Canadian cigarettes were being exported out of Quebec and Ontario into the States. One can only assume that an Ottawa foolocracy, charged with eyeballing the industry, had determined that Canadian cigarettes had suddenly become, "...shazaam!", wildly popular to the rest of the world.

And before you could say "Robin, The Hoodster", those tax-free cigarettes were re-routed through Northern New York State to Akwesasne. There, smugglers gleefully loaded high-speed boats with multiple loads and shipped them back into Canada via the St. Lawrence River where they begat easy resale and huge profits on the black-market.

The problem became so severe for Quebec in 1992, it was estimated that (until cigarette taxes were drastically cut in February of 1994) an astounding three-quarters of all butts were purchased from the black market in one form or another.

The Quebec black market was so out in the open it was not so unusual to see a grandmother or two loitering outside the men's room along major highways in the province. "Psssst! Mister...you want cigarettes?"

It didn't take long for the horrifying tab to add up big-time in Ottawa. Analysts estimated that the loss to the Provinces and the Canadian government amounted to billions of dollars (spelled with a B) in lost tax revenues during the early years of the decade.

Canada's first reaction to the wholesale contraband trade, through and around Akwesasne, was the establishment of a special law-enforcement task

force, headquartered in Cornwall, and headed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. But while the RCMP did have occasional victories against the smugglers, the overall success in stopping the cross-border trade was about as effective as spitting into a hurricane.

Only when the Canadian government drastically reduced taxes on the smokes in 1993 (the Provinces followed suit days later) did the cigarette smuggling trade drop to conceivable proportions.

But, hardest to swallow amongst the Mohawks has been the hypocritical finger pointing from points beyond the Reservation. During the early years of the 1990s, Akwesasne harvested an international reputation as a smuggler's paradise. Indeed, the St. Lawrence River around the Territory has long been dubbed "Smuggler's Alley".

What really hurts the vast majority of the non-smuggling residents of Akwesasne is this; while 40% of smoking Canada was puffing away comfortably on the deliciously illegal smoke sticks, the Ottawa bureaucracy responsible for the taxation baboonery in the first place was screaming, "Hey, don't look at us...it's the Mohawks!"

For at least part of the period when the transport of contraband out of the Reserve has been an enigma, the Mohawk government on the Canadian side has been offering to pitch in to fight the illicit trade. But, because "Father knows best", neither the Americans nor the Canadians have been willing to listen to their 'progeny' in the form of some very intelligent and thoughtful Mohawk leaders.

Foremost among those circumspect enough to think there is a way to slow down the felonious border activity is Grand Chief Mike Mitchell of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne (MCA). It is Mitchell who has long advocated that both the Canadian and American governments should support his proposal recommending the establishment of a Tribal investigative force that would operate much as do the Border Patrol contingents in the two neighboring countries.

Because Mitchell has to be ever cognizant of the sovereignty issue, he is recommending the Americans and the Canadians help the Territory finance a Mohawk unit to work the border from the inside.

To no ones surprise, neither of the major countries have expressed a whole lot of enthusiasm for Mitchell's plan. Much of the opposition stems from long-standing inter-agency jealousies that have more to do with the protection of individual turf than they do with crime fighting.

And both countries would prefer to put their own federal officers into Indian Country. That's almost as offensive to Mohawks as putting a Canadian in charge of the FBI. Americans would belch and hurl. Reverse scenario with the RCMP.

Another philosophical sentiment at work here seems to have everything in the

world to do with Big Brother and not much to do with practicality, or reality for that matter. Funding such a project by the two bigger governments has traditionally meant that, harumph, "The Great Fathers in Washington and Ottawa" paternalistically "...know best how to administer such things."

Maybe Canada and the United States should both lighten up. The Grand Chief

and his people have a vested interest in tightening border incursions. As easy as it is to smuggle cigarettes, booze, diapers, humans, Persian rugs, contraceptives or dozens of other commodities through the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation, it should be remembered that heroin, cocaine and marijuana are also making the trip in smuggled backpacks. And, inevitably, some of those

illicit drugs are finding their way into the bloodstream of Mohawk children. That doesn't sit well with most residents of the community. Led by the elders, they clamor for action.

And so, Chief Mitchell now calls for the United States and Canada to meet with Mohawks in a May summit to discuss everyone's border and everybody's dilemma. Mitchell says Akwesasne has been accused of doing nothing about smuggling. Now is the time, he encourages, for all sides to come together.

Said Mitchell last week, "The shoe is on the other foot now, and if there is no willingness to support our initiative, then we'll have to start making laws from within our (own) Nation and find our own resources."

Chief Mitchell has a 24-officer Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service now patrolling the Canadian portion of the Reservation. However, says he, the force is trained to provide regular policing and doesn't have the resources to combat smuggling. That's where the U.S. and the Canadians could help.

The special Mohawk smuggling unit Mitchell has suggested would consist of eight Mohawk officers specializing in border-specific crimes and would work in conjunction with the present Akwesasne police force.

The concept is not new. The MCA has put it on the table before. What is also old is the bureaucratic foot-dragging by the Canadian, Ontario and Quebec governments over the proposal. And when you add the U.S. and New York State to the equation, you have the makings of a grand boondoggle; the possibility that "...ain't nobody gonna' agree with anybody."

But just maybe, cooler heads and smarter minds will come together this time.

The Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service has shown skill in keeping the peace on the Canadian side of the Reservation. It is probably true, too, that the same people entrusted with administering the Mohawk force, left to their own devices, and some specialized training, could tighten the demarcation line through Akwesasne more effectively than all the outside units combined. The view from the inside, as any self-respecting undercover cop would point out, is far better than trying to peek through a window from the outside. The bushes and the curtains always seem to be getting in the way.

Canadian and American law enforcement agencies should listen carefully to what Grand Chief Mike Mitchell has to propose. It's an idea whose time came long ago.

And most important to Mohawks, the concept poses absolutely no threat to sovereignty.

Ceasar's continued

ing. And now, the latest: Park Place Entertainment, which owns Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas and several other similar gambling emporiums around the world, is in serious negotiation for a majority partnership arrangement in the enterprise at Hogansburg. That, in itself, is not news. Those discussions have been going on for several months now.

What IS new comes from Akwesasne Mohawk Casino spokeswoman Alison Calkins who is saying a new agreement between the Tribe and Park could be in place almost any minute now. No specifics have been released on the degree of control the new management firm will exercise, or whether Park will be the sole partner with the Tribe when a deal is finalized.

All of which leads to speculation that the giant gambling corporation may be looking at the Akwesasne Casino as a giant 'foot-in-the-door' with the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe. That could be of extreme value should the Tribe be successful in establishing its proposed new gambling casino at Monticello Raceway in the Catskills.

At stake; a projected annual gross of \$500 million dollars in annual gambling receipts at Monticello should the plan be OK'd by New York Governor George Pataki and the two legislative bodies in Albany, all of which looks likely sometime soon. Hopes for a big 'cash cow' at Monticello may be realistic because the site is only 50 miles north of New York City.

Even New York City billionaire developer Donald Trump opposes the Mohawk plans for Monticello and wants the project stopped. Transparent in Trump's opposition is protection of his own corporation's large casino holdings in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Park Place Entertainment is the top gaming company in the world in casino square footage and revenues. Even larger, say industry analysts, than those gambling investments held by "The Donald & Company".



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